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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000305

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER

NAZIF

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone, for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Nazif asked the Ambassador for help dealing with Congress, complaining that Egypt could not get a fair hearing. Particularly regarding Ayman Nour, the full story of the case needed to be communicated; "Nour is a crook." The Ambassador raised Egypt's reluctance to refer Iran to the Security Council, the disparity between the conclusions of the U.S. and Egyptian investigators in the Flash Airlines crash investigation, and blockage of U.S. imports due to unfounded concerns over avian flu. Nazif said he would look into each of these issues, and that he would consider the Ambassador's offer to look into ways to increase police training in the wake of the botched removal of Sudanese refugees by Egyptian police. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a meeting with the Ambassador on January 16, Prime Minister Nazif noted that President Mubarak wants to maintain stability in the region. He does not want Syria to become another conflict, like Iraq, Palestine and Sudan. Nazif hoped the U.S. recognized Mubarak was willing to go wherever he was needed and do whatever he must to help prevent conflict in the region, particularly regarding Syria.

¶3. (C) Nazif expressed frustration that U.S. newspapers had declined to print an op-ed he had written about Egypt's progress in democratic and economic reform. The Ambassador encouraged Nazif to talk to U.S. and world broadcast media to present a fuller international understanding of Egypt and to consider building "public diplomacy" into Egypt's standard diplomacy, much as we do. Nazif said he had ordered substantial budget increases for the embassy in Washington for this purpose. The upcoming World Economic Forum in Davos was another opportunity to advance the bilateral dialogue, as Deputy Secretary of State Zoellick would lead a high-level U.S. delegation to the event, and was planning to see Minister of Trade Rachid. Nazif replied that he was planning to attend Davos and would welcome meeting U.S. officials there.

¶4. (C) Nazif emphasized his interest in improving Egypt's relationship with Congress. He pledged to meet with any visiting members and to brief them candidly about the GOE's challenges and policies. The Ambassador noted that Congressman Wolf was in town, holding meetings on human rights issues. Ayman Nour's case was of great concern, and Wolf's request for a meeting with Nour had not yet been approved (Note: In the end the GOE declined to permit Wolf to meet with Nour. End note). It was important that Nour's case be fully explained, Nazif stressed, especially to Congress. Nour was a "crook," Nazif said, and Mubarak would not grant clemency, but "this case was a mistake." Nazif promised he would look into the possibility of release on bail pending Nour's appeal.

¶5. (C) On the issue of trade, the Ambassador noted that the Nour case and problems with the recent parliamentary election had made this an inopportune moment for the Administration to notifying Congress of intent to negotiate an FTA. We hoped Nazif's January 30 presentation to the new parliament of the GOE's program would show renewed determination to advance democratic reforms and help generate some "good news" stories about Egypt.

¶6. (C) On Iran, the Ambassador noted that Secretary Rice had stated publicly that the U.S. wanted to pursue diplomatic means to handle the conflict with Iran, and referral to the Security Council was the only option for keeping diplomacy alive. So far, Egypt had not supported this emerging consensus view within the IAEA. Nazif noted that Egypt's views were based on its policies toward Israel, and had nothing to do with favoring Iran. He said he would see what could be done, however, as he didn't like the "company" Egypt was in on the opposing side of the issue in the IAEA.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador also raised the investigation of the Flash Airlines crash in Sharm el Sheikh in January 2004, and noted the disagreement between the conclusions of the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and those of the Egyptian investigators regarding the cause of the crash. Nazif's Chef de Cabinet, Sami Zaghloul, said that the report

of the investigative team from the French government was in agreement with the Egyptian investigators' conclusions. The Ambassador disagreed, saying he had spoken to the French Ambassador, who confirmed that the French conclusions were in line with the U.S.'s, not Egypt's. Nazif said he was not briefed on the issue, and would need to learn more about it.

18. (C) The Ambassador noted that avian influenza-related import restrictions were impeding the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit's (NAMRU) efforts to help Egypt and the region combat the problem. Customs had also now banned imports of feather meal and powdered eggs without any scientific justification. Nazif replied that the previous Minister of Health had gotten President Mubarak "scared" about the issue. He said that sound science must be the basis of GOE actions on this issue. Zaghloul added that the NAMRU issue had been resolved, but that the ban on feather meal was needed, as the virus could live in the feathers. The Ambassador countered that the feather meal was processed at high temperatures, killing any viruses. A scientific investigation should demonstrate the safety of feather meal imports.

19. (C) Nazif regretted the tragic outcome of the police attempt last month to remove Sudanese refugees from a residential district. The police clearly had mishandled their execution of the task. The Ambassador noted that he had discussed the issue with Mrs. Mubarak, who asked what the U.S. could do to help. If the GOE was interested, the Ambassador would consider seeking law enforcement training for Egypt. He had already broached this with the Minister of Interior, but Nazif's support would be essential. Nazif replied that he believed something needed to be done about the police in Egypt, but it should start with a comprehensive review of Egypt's law enforcement policies. Mubarak would have to agree to this, and the policy review would have to be done in a way that did not threaten the law enforcement agencies. The GOE had to be careful how it handled public perceptions of U.S. assistance, as the perception was still that the U.S. always had ulterior motives for assistance.

RICCIARDONE